It is a circumstance worthy of attention, that all diseases which attack the body are in the first instance diseases of excitement. This fact is of the greatest practical importance and since its introduction, has effected a great revolution in the practice of Medicine: For many of those diseases which were formerly considered as of weak morbid action, have from the more accurate investigation of modern physicians been proved to come on with an excited state of the system, and even typhus fever, which generally from the commencement was looked upon as a disease of the lowest grade, is now universally allowed, by the most intelligent practitioners, to come on with increased action, and frequently to such a degree as to require bloodletting. — These assertions are not only substanciated by facts and observations, but may likewise be supported by the theory of Fever, which has been so ably taught in this University.

From whatever source the remote cause may arise, whether from Cola, Coina or Idio-miasmatic exhalations, debility is invariably the predisposing cause of all diseases; with this debility there is an accumulation of excitability, and in this state, the system may exist for months and even years, without disease, unless some exciting cause be applied, for the action of an irritant

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This would be the case if the debility were from abstin
but if on the contrary it was from action, the
excitability would be reduced and the excitement
increased, when it would be equally necessary
to abstract stimulus, that the excitability may b
accumulated and the excitement lessened.

is absolutely necessary for the formation of disease. If this is the progress of the system to ~~[illegible]~~ disease, as it most indubitably is, and ~~the~~ an exciting cause acting upon accumulated excitability thereby causing excitement is necessary to constitute disease, it must be granted that whether the exciting cause be so powerful as to prostrate the system, as in malignant fever, or only to induce Catarrh, still in the first instance they must be diseases of action. #

These observations I have premised, as frequent reference will be made to them in the course of this essay: and from an adoption of those principles, the subject will be rendered more interesting to the physician, and important to the patient, for while it directs the one more frequently to prescribe, it will admonish the other strictly to observe abstinence in the prevention and cure of diseases.

Before entering upon this subject it may be necessary to observe, that abstinence is a relative term, and may be divided into partial and entire. It is therefore my intention to treat

1.st of the effects of partial abstinence on the body.

It acts by lessening the quantity of the fluids; to prove this, it is only necessary to glance over the process of chylification, and observe that aliment being taken into the stomach, after digestion is there performed passes into the duodenum in the form of chyme, and the chyle taken up by the lacteals is in proportion to the quantity and

a force small a portion of which to produce no
exact stimulating effect

quality of the chyme; the lacteals then discharge their contents into the thoracic duct, which opens into the subclavian vein, and it thereby mingles with the general mass of blood, by which means, that portion which is continually expended in the different secretions and excretions, is reproduced. From this short account it must appear evident, that as the quantity and relative quality of the chyme is increased, so likewise will the chyle and of course the mass of blood, and as the blood must be considered as the principal fluid of the body, from which all others are secreted, and likewise a powerful stimulating agent, so by reducing the aliment, which may be considered as the first cause, we lessen the quantity of the fluids, which are only the consequent effect.

2. By abstinence the stimulus of distention is likewise removed, and altho' this effect may appear trivial, yet from attending to the subject, it will certainly be granted, to be a circumstance of great importance. For instances have occurred in which the apparently feeble stimulus of a full meal has induced apoplexy; and cases of the yellow fever being excited in persons impregnated with the infection, by a distended stomach are very frequent, as can be testified by some of the

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3. In abstracting the quantity of aliment, the quality is by no means to be neglected, for altho' all substances may act by their bulk in producing a stimulating effect, yet the duration and degree of the stimulus caused, is in proportion to the digestable nature, stimulating quality, or nourishing properties of the aliment taken; thus if a person eats the same portion of the flesh of an old ox, or of a young partridge, drinks the same quantity of strong punch or pure water, takes an equal ~~quantity~~ portion of rich soup or thin gruel, altho' the stimulus of distention would in every case be the same, yet their general stimulating effects on the system would be greatly varied both in duration and degree, according to the diversified qualities of the articles used. By attending to this we may frequently prescribe abstinence without apparent restraint, merely by lessening the nourishing and stimulating quality of the aliment taken.

2.nd of the effects of entire abstinence.

Total abstinence from food is attended with all the advantages that have been ascribed to partial, but in a greater degree: For while the one only lessens the action of the stomach, removes in part the nourishment afforded by aliment and diminishes the stimulus from food; the other suspends the office of that viscus altogether, and abstracts entirely

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both the nourishment and stimulus received from articles of diet.

On the pulse it has very evident effects. To ascertain this I made the following experiment. I abstained from all food and drink from 7 o'clock in one evening until 7 the next, my pulse at the commencement being at its natural standard, namely 85 strokes in a minute; at eight o'clock the next morning it was examined by ~~a~~ friend Mr. Fuller, he found it to be 80 in the minute, but full and strong; at twelve o'clock he again examined it when it was 58 and evidently reduced in force, at four o'clock P.M. it had fallen to 54, at six it was 52 and at seven it rose in frequency to 80 but was considerably diminished in force, in this state it remained until I took tea when it rose to 71 and was both full and strong. This experiment not only proves the effect of abstinence in reducing the pulse, but likewise shews the excitability to have much accumulated ~~from the stimulating effect produced by the small portion of stimulus~~.

And when we recur to the fact that by total abstinence the wild Elephant is uncased docile and even affectionate, and the violent maniac for a time calmed, we are struck with the importance of the remedy and astonished that it has not been more frequently employed in the treatment of diseases. The advantage of having recourse to this mode of depletion is that it does not act by weaning down the excitability and thereby reducing the system as

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[illegible] course of long abstinence that the stimulus of the oysters and the veal broth, which in health would have had little effect were sufficient to [illegible] the [illegible] mentioned.

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For in this case the cure evidently was effected by fasting.

Not only in the forming state of disease, and in diseases when formed, are advantages to be derived from attending to abstinence, but in convalescence it is likewise absolutely necessary. For at a time when the digestive organs are weak and the system highly excitable, distending the stomach with more aliment than it can digest, or taking food the stimulus of which is not proportioned to the excitability of the system, is highly prejudicial and has frequently caused a relapse, in persons who had every prospect of a speedy recovery.

It is to be regretted that a remedy so generally useful in the treatment of diseases, the effects of which can be so easily regulated by the physician, has not been more attended to. For not only has it often suppressed diseases in their commencement and checked them when formed, but occasional abstinence is likewise extremely beneficial in health, by allowing the system to equalize itself. Doctor Franklin sensible of its benefits made it a practice once every week to abstain from food, in order, as he said, "to give nature an opportunity of cleaning out her streets." Were this practice generally adopted, it would do away the prejudicial custom of taking medicine in health, many ~~[illegible]~~ would attain a good

good old age and while it made men temperate, it would render them more happy -